

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017*

## **The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Alexios Tsipras of Greece**

*October 17, 2017*

*President Trump.* Thank you very much. I just want to make an initial comment that the stock market just hit an alltime record high. It broke, for the first time ever, 23,000. So we're very happy about that. I hope that Greece is going to be doing the same thing very soon. *[Laughter]* I think they will.

But I'm honored to welcome Prime Minister Tsipras to Greece—from—of Greece, and he's a special man who's done a very special job. We're grateful to the Prime Minister and to his entire delegation for visiting us today at the White House.

Greece is a cradle of Western civilization—so true—of democracy, literature, philosophy, science, and so much else. America looks on that glorious heritage with wonder and with awe. You do indeed have a tremendous heritage, Mr. Prime Minister.

Perhaps for this reason, America's friendship with the Greek people has been long and enduring. Thomas Jefferson wrote at the dawn of the modern Greek state that "no people sympathize more" with Greek patriots and "none offer more sincere and ardent prayers to heaven for their success" than the American people. Jefferson's words are true to this day.

Mr. Prime Minister, I'm proud to report that this past March, we celebrated Greek Independence Day right here at the White House. And that was great. America and Greece draw on this common history and heritage and on our peoples' abiding commitment to freedom and sovereignty in working together on great challenges and opportunities now before us. There are tremendous opportunities before us in so many different ways.

The Prime Minister and I have just concluded a very productive discussion on the cooperation between our two countries, including on matters of defense, energy, commerce, and trade. I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Greek people for serving as gracious hosts to our U.S. naval forces at Souda Bay. I also commend Greece for being one of the few NATO countries currently spending at least 2 percent of GDP on defense. My administration has also informed Congress of a potential sale to Greece to upgrade its F-16 aircraft. This agreement to strengthen the Hellenic Air Force is worth up to \$2.4 billion and would generate thousands of American jobs.

We also are making great strides in our economic cooperation. The American people stand with the Greek people as they recover from the economic crisis that recently afflicted their nation. I've encouraged the Prime Minister in his continued implementation of reform and reform programs, and I have totally reaffirmed our support for a responsible debt relief plan. A strong and flourishing Greece provides immense opportunity for American trade, investment, and job creation. I thank the Prime Minister, his predecessors, and the Greek people for their efforts to return stability and prosperity to Greece.

On energy, we appreciate Greek contributions to European energy security through its support of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector, and liquefied natural gas facilities that are capable of transporting diverse sources of energy to Europe, including potential liquefied natural gas exports from the United States, of which that

particular route and business is getting bigger and bigger and bigger, as you know. These initiatives make both our people safer and create good jobs for our hard-working citizens.

Finally, I am also very proud that the United States will be the honored country at next year's International Fair in Greece. This historic business and trade exhibition will showcase American technology, enterprise, and innovation on the world stage. We look very much forward to sending a high-level delegation to attend this wonderful event.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you again for being here today and for your partnership in addressing critical issues facing our countries. I look forward to having many productive discussions with you and to having a very close and warm cooperation on a wide range of shared objectives. We will build upon our foundation of shared history and shared values to pursue a future of security, prosperity, and peace for both your nation and ours.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you very much. Thank you.

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* I would like to warmly thank the President of the United States for his hospitality and for his very productive discussions we had today. The friendship between our two countries is very strong, and it's based on our common democratic principles, on the values that we jointly share as peoples.

It is correct that the founders of the United States were inspired by Ancient Greece, and the Greek revolution was inspired by the American Revolution for independence. At the same time, our relationship is based—is also based on a very dynamic diaspora of Greek people here in the U.S., which offers many—have many to offer for both countries.

As we underlined earlier, the Greek-U.S. relationships may be at their best compared to the past since the Second World War when our peoples worked together and fought together shoulder to shoulder against fascism. And I do believe that there are many reasons for this. Today, our strategy is based on mutual respect, and it is fed by the significant support provided by the U.S. to Greece and to the Greek people during the hard times of the economic crisis, support for the exit of Greece from the crisis. And at this point, I would like to just focus a bit.

Greece today fulfills three basic objectives which do not only relate to Greece, but I would say that are of special significance at an international level. First, it is dynamically coming out of a crisis, noting wonderful growth rates, and it's beginning to attract investments and increase its exports, as we see as well from the Greek-U.S. balance of trade. Not—and it's leaving behind not only a crisis, but it's leaving behind the economic model that led to the crisis.

Second, Greece today is the most significant pillar of security and cooperation in one of the most important—but at the same time, unstable, sensitive—areas of the planet: a country with a dynamic, multidimensional foreign policy; a country which is a reliable partner and ally of the United States, which fulfills its NATO obligations. And it is in close cooperation in the defense sector with the United States. It's a country which maintains the dialogue with Turkey despite the difficulties that we face and the challenges, but knowing the very important European course of Turkey. It's a country, also, that promotes cooperation in the Middle East and the Balkans, which contribute to the security and the growth of the area.

And third, Greece, being already pretty strong in maritime and tourism, is gradually becoming a significant crossroads for transportation and energy. I would like to mention the completion of the TAP pipeline and the EastMed pipeline; the agreement for a floating—for an LNG station in Alexandroupolis, which is northeast Greece, and the prospect that

Alexandroupolis will be an area where we can receive exports—imports from the United States of fracking.

And I would like to mention the—our ports from Athens and Thessaloniki and the promotion of strong and fast rail connections with the rest of the Balkans. And in this context, it's very clear that our strategic cooperation with the United States is becoming more important than ever.

First of all, we look forward—because we look forward—and this is a significant message of my visit here and my meeting with economic representatives—we look forward to attracting U.S. investments and the more substantial support of the U.S. in our effort to exit this horrible crisis. The fact that the United States will be the honored country in 2018 in the International Fair of Thessaloniki will play a significant role in this effort.

Second, because Greece can develop—dynamically develop—in creating a pillar of stability and security only if it is freed from the fundamental national concerns in the areas of security and defense. The United States have a significant role to play in this matter and not only in the diplomatic, but also in the defense sector. And we look forward, in this context, in the fair and the viable solution in the Cypriot issue based on the decisions of the U.N. Security Council, a solution for the benefit of all Cypriots without guarantors or occupying military forces that will give a new perspective to the area. But at the same time, we are underlining that the dangerous intervention-type presence of Turkey in the Aegean must end. It undermines on a daily basis the relationship between two NATO allies in a broader, unstable, and sensitive area. Greece is a country that's always open to dialogue, but I want to be very clear: It will always protect decisively its sovereignty rights against illicit claims and disputes.

And with these thoughts, I would like to warmly thank President Trump for his warm—for the wonderful discussions we held, which I believe will give a very substantial push to the existing dynamic cooperation. And I believed and I said that we created a work group between the Ministers of Economy, the secretaries for the economy, so we can monitor the ability to have a substantial cooperation in investment, in economy, and in all sectors.

Thank you very much, sir.

*President Trump.* We'll take a few questions. John [John Roberts, Fox News], go ahead, please.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Good to see you out in the Rose Garden again.

*President Trump.* Thank you. Nice place.

Q. We seem to do this on occasion. [*Laughter*]

*President Trump.* It's a nice place.

### *Health Care Reform/Senate Confirmation of Presidential Nominations*

Q. I have a question for the Prime Minister in a moment, if I could. But first, sir, you said just a short time ago that Obamacare is virtually dead. Your plans for Graham-Cassidy have not been able to get off the ground in the Senate. There is no idea whether or not it will in early 2018. You've been picking around the edges, to some degree, with Executive orders, some of which, critics say, are helping to destroy Obamacare. So I'm wondering at this point, what is your health care plan, sir?

*President Trump.* Well, if you look at insurance companies and you take a good, strong look at the numbers, you'll see, since the formation of Obamacare, they're up 400 percent, 450 percent, 250 percent, 300 percent. They've made a fortune, the insurance companies.

So when I knocked out the hundreds of millions of dollars a month being paid back to the insurance companies by politicians, I must tell you, that wanted me to continue to pay this, I said I'm not going to do it. This is money that goes to the insurance companies to line their pockets, to raise up their stock prices. And they've had a record run. They've had an incredible run, and it's not appropriate.

Obamacare is a disaster. It's virtually dead. As far as I'm concerned, it really is dead, and I predicted that a long time ago. It's a concept that doesn't work. And we are very close.

We feel we have the votes, and as soon as we're finished with taxes, John—we really feel we have the votes to get block grants into the States, where the States can much better manage this money and much better take care of the people, rather than the Federal Government. The State block grants—we'll do massive block grants into the various States so that the States can run the program.

So we feel we have the votes. We're going to be doing that after the taxes. In the meantime, we're involved with a budget, and then after the budget—hopefully, that gets approved—and after the budget, assuming we have the support of all the Republicans—because we'll have no support from the Democrats or almost no support, because they've really become just obstructionists. They have no good policies, and frankly, they're not good politicians, but they're very good obstructionists. And that's what they do well: obstruct.

The number of nominees that I have approved by the Democrats are about half of what President Obama had. And when you look at that—and you can look at judicial appointments, look how slow that's going. I'll have 145 ultimately, which is a tremendous number. We'll have 17 Court of Appeals appointments. But they're not getting approved. They're being slow-walked by Schumer and the group of Democrats that really—it's really disgraceful. Even people that they know they're going to approve, they take it right out to the end. They use every single minute, and I think it's a very disgraceful situation.

But Obamacare is everything but dead. The people aren't going to take it. The—they're not going to take it. Alaska, they had over a 200-percent increase. In Arizona, they were 116 percent, and I hear going up even higher. And the people aren't going to take that any longer.

So I think we're in great shape. I think we have the votes. And we'll be doing that right after the largest tax cuts in the history of our country are approved, hopefully, sometime in the very near future.

*Q.* So is Graham-Cassidy still the plan, sir?

*President Trump.* Yes, essentially, that would be the plan. Yes, block grants.

### *U.S. Foreign Policy*

*Q.* And, Mr. Prime Minister, with respect to the President, in March of 2016, you said, at the potential for a Donald Trump Presidency, "I hope we will not face this evil." [*Laughter*] And I'm wondering if, after spending time with the President, you have changed your mind or if you're of the same mind.

*President Trump.* I wish I knew that before my speech. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* The meeting I had with the President—his approach and the way he addresses most publics—[inaudible]. The U.S. is a very strong power, and their ability to intervene for good are very, very important.

I want to confirm that the meeting that we had was very productive. Not a moment did I feel threatened at any time. I saw that there is a very fertile outlook here. In order to set aside any differences that we may have to find the common ground, the common ground which is really important for the relationship between the two—our two peoples that are traditional and historical and for our common objectives.

We need common values—we have common values, excuse me. Don't forget that the value of democracy and freedom was born in Greece, and it's one of the basic values that traverses American culture and American tradition. The President today, of the U.S., is—continues this tradition. And I think our collaboration will be very substantial, and I'm very optimistic after our meeting that we had today.

*President Trump.* Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. I might just add that a number of countries were a little bit nervous at the beginning. And I have very good relationships with the leaders of virtually every country I've dealt with. But the reason they were concerned was because I will not allow our country, the United States of America, to be taken advantage of by so many other countries all over the world.

If you look at our trade deficits, massive trade deficits with virtually every country. If you look at our jobs moving out to certain countries, and the companies are leaving, and they're firing the people, and the product is made elsewhere, and then it's sold back into the United States. I'm not going to be allowing that.

So I can understand how certain countries and the leaders of certain countries may feel. But we're just not going to allow the United States to be taken advantage of by other countries anymore. And there's nothing we can do about that.

Thank you.

Okay, you have a question.

#### *Greece's Economy/Greece-U.S. Relations*

*Q.* [Inaudible]—with the Greek Public TV. Mr. Prime Minister, how do you plan to attract the long-term foreign direct investments in Greece? And if you can elaborate, please, on the steps that Greece is making to tackle bureaucracy and overtaxation in order to ensure investments—investors around the world that Greece is ready for business.

And, Mr. President, if I may, why would you encourage the U.S. companies to invest in Greece? And how can the U.S. support the Greek efforts to fully turn the page, attract investments, and manage its debt? Thank you.

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* First of all, this is a—one thing is to intervene legislatively to attract investment. And it's different to work on a daily basis to implement these intentions in a stable environment.

We opted to conflict with the basic illnesses of Greek public administration and to create a friendly environment for foreign investment, because this is our investment—our priority today. Investment means jobs. Jobs means less unemployment. And it means return of young people that have left Greece—educated Greeks that have left Greece to go to other countries—to come back to Greece.

So what did we do? We passed a law in Parliament that provides a stable tax environment, a tax rate—a fixed tax rate—for 12 years for investments of high value. We simplified the procedures to provide licenses to investments. We instituted—we introduced the fast-track process for strategic investments. And we also made significant change to hit and combat bureaucracy through digitization of procedures—administrative procedures—in public administration. And our vision is to have a digital public administration, but that we really want to make it practice.

I, personally, have created a task force in the Prime Minister's office for investments so we can see whether laws are being implemented, whether there is effectiveness. And we are sending out a strong signal of political will to promote these projects.

The President asked me earlier what is happening with the Ellinikon, with the old airport, where years ago, he, himself as a businessman in the past was interested in it. And he saw, himself, the weaknesses and the illnesses of Greek public administration. I informed him it's moving on—it's moving along, and very soon we will see this area to—being formed to a very, very large real estate project in Greece, which will be—we're hoping it will be an attraction for other investments from abroad.

I'd like to also say that Greece, for the first time, from the last country, is the first country in absorbing European funds—investment capital from European structural funds. So we find ourselves at a turning point, a point where investments can provide the ability to exit, finally, the crisis.

And the message I want to pass on to U.S. investments is that Greece is not just a tourist attraction, the best maybe in the world, but it's also an investment attraction, an investment destination as well.

*President Trump.* I can say that we have a great confidence in Greece. I think it's a land of tremendous potential. I know many people are looking to invest in Greece. A lot of the problems are behind it. They've had some very good leadership. They've really done a lot of—they've made a lot of difficult decisions.

We are helping, as you know, with a massive renovation of their air force and also of airplanes, generally, going to Greece. They're looking at buying additional planes from Boeing. And we are helping—we're very much involved with Greece and with helping Greece get back on its feet. We have a tremendous Greek population in this country, people whose heritage is Greece. And we love that country, special country, one of the most beautiful countries in the world. And so I think it's got great potential, and we are helping it along.

Okay. Jennifer [Jennifer Jacobs, Bloomberg News], you want to go?

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

*President Trump.* Sure.

### *Chair of the Federal Reserve System's Board of Governors*

Q. I have a question for both of you, but let me start with you, Mr. President. Let me give you a quick question about the Federal Reserve. Do you have any other candidates that you're looking at other than Powell, Yellen, the five that have already been named? Are you looking at anyone besides those folks?

*President Trump.* I would say within those five you'll probably get the answer. And I'll be making this decision over the next fairly short period of time.

Q. Can you say who your favorite is at this point?

*President Trump.* Honestly, I like them all.

Q. [Laughter] Okay.

*President Trump.* I do. I have a great respect for all of them. But I'll make a decision over the next very short period of time.

### *Health Care Reform*

Q. Can I ask you a quick Obamacare question as well, even though John Roberts asked one as well?

*President Trump.* Sure, sure.

Q. Apparently, Lamar Alexander has said he's made a deal with Senator Patty Murray to stabilize Obamacare. Has the White House been involved in those negotiations? And will you support that deal?

*President Trump.* Yes, we have been involved. And this is a short-term deal, because we think, ultimately, block grants going to the States is going to be the answer. That's a very good solution. We think it's going to not only save money, but give people much better health care with a very, very much smaller premium spike—and you look at what has gone on with that—also, much lower deductibles so they can use it.

Lamar has been working very, very hard with the Democratic—his colleagues on the other side, and Patty Murray is one of them, in particular. And they're coming up, and they're fairly close to a short-term solution. The solution will be for about a year or 2 years, and it will get us over this intermediate hump, because we have—as you probably know, we have—we either have the votes or we are very close to having the votes. And we will get the votes for having, really, the potential of having great health care in our country.

So they are indeed working, but it is a short-term solution so that we don't have this very dangerous little period—including dangerous period for insurance companies, by the way. For a period of 1 year, 2 years, we will have a very good solution. But we're going to have a great solution, ultimately, for health care. Okay?

Q. Thank you.

*President Trump.* And they are working together, and I know very much what they're doing. Okay? Thank you.

Q. Thank you. And, Mr. Prime Minister, on Turkey, do you still regard Turkey as a democracy? And should Turkey remain a member of NATO?

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* I have to say that despite our concerns regarding Turkey, despite the concerns that are also based on the daily intervention—Turkish intervention in the region, nevertheless, we continue to support the Turkish course the—towards Europe. We respect it as a regional power, and we believe that it must stay oriented toward the European perspective, stably—oriented to its collaboration with the West, and—or stably oriented towards NATO. We do believe that the European outlook—perspective of Turkey can also be a lever of pressure so that there is—we can have those reforms towards the democratization of the domestic of the country.

So my answer to your question is relatively easy. Yes, we do believe that Turkey must remain within NATO and in its European course. But on the other side, we have to ensure—and we must make it clear to this ally of ours and its—to its Government that the road to Europe, and this day and the collaboration with the West, carries with it certain conditions and certain responsibilities.

And one of the most necessary conditions is to respect international law, to collaborate and not promote tension with allied countries such as Greece. This is our basic direction. And I do believe—I had the opportunity to go in detail on this matter with President Trump to explaining the need for the fulfillment of these conditions so that there are clear messages. Also, toward the Turkish administration.

### *Greece's Role in Europe/Greece-U.S. Relations*

*Q.* Thank you. Mr. Prime Minister, how do you—us Greeks, like to hear about the geostrategic importance of Greece in the region. What is your government planning to do to enhance this role and to—for the benefit of the bilateral relationship? And for, specifically in Souda Bay, are there any plans you have for it?

And, Mr. President, you praised Greece's role in NATO with the contribution and with—in Souda Bay amid the volatile region of the Eastern Mediterranean. What do you see as the potential of Greece being as a pillar of stability in the region? And what would the U.S. like to see happening in order for Greece to achieve this potential? Thank you.

*President Trump.* Well, I'd just start by saying that I think it has a great role in stability in the area. We have a feeling that it will get stronger and stronger. Very stable people. It's got the potential to be—once it gets over this tremendous financial hurdle that it's in the process of working out, we think that there will be great stability in Greece and militarily and in every way we look at it as very important, and very important to the United States.

We have great confidence in Greece as a nation. We have great confidence in what they're doing relative to their military, because I know they have plans to do some terrific things. And we know they will be an ally for many, many years to come. You know, they've always been a very reliable ally, and we've always been very reliable to them. So we look forward to that for many years. We're going to be friends for many, many years, and stability is very important. And we look upon that, with respect to Greece, as being a key. Okay?

Thank you.

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* As regards the initiatives that we're going to be taking, but also regarding the initiatives that we have taken to broaden the strategic role of Greece as a reliable partner, both in the EU and NATO, I'd like to say that from the first moment we took over the administration, we moved—we proceeded to a new dogma through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but as a basic aim to enhance the role of Greece as a country that is a pillar of safe—security and stability in a very sensitive and unstable area—region.

We enhanced our collaboration with two significant partners in the area—Egypt and Israel—and Greece Cyprus with Israel and Greece Cyprus and with Egypt and with other countries in the area such as Jordan, Lebanon. Our goal is that, through these multilateral collaborations, to ensure the collaboration, stability, peace, and joint development, joint growth in this area.

Of course, Greece for a number of years has been playing, as underlined earlier—it plays a very—the role of a reliable ally of the U.S., but it also has a unique, different feature. Greece



may be talking with the Arab world, with other countries in the East. So it's not just a NATO member. It's a useful ally for the United States of America.

Now, as regards Crete and Souda Bay, we all know it is a special geostrategic importance, and we evaluated it—jointly evaluated it—and I think that we're doing good work there. And it can, and it must, be upgraded, enhanced.

*President Trump.* Well, I want to thank everybody. And the Prime Minister came out here, and he said, this is so beautiful. I said, this is the Rose Garden. And I think even the media likes the Rose Garden. *[Laughter]* That's hard to believe, but even the media likes it.

Mr. Prime Minister, it's been a great honor having you, and we look forward to many, many years of friendship, working together. And keep up the good work.

Thank you very much.

*Prime Minister Tsipras.* Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:46 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer; Jerome H. Powell, Governor, and Janet L. Yellen, Chair, Federal Reserve System Board of Governors; National Economic Council Director Gary D. Cohn; Kevin M. Warsh, Shepard Family Distinguished Visiting Fellow in Economics, Hoover Institution; and John B. Taylor, Mary and Robert Raymond Professor of Economics, Stanford University. Prime Minister Tsipras referred to Minister of Economy and Development Dimitrios Papadimitriou; and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin. Prime Minister Tsipras spoke in Greek, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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